

Dignity of the Abject

The Anticipatory Aesthetics of Arca's Kick iii

ABSTRACT Released as part of a five-album series in late 2021, Arca's *Kick iii* is a cacophonous mix of genres that coalesce around themes of sex, violence, and transformation. This article positions *Kick iii* as operationalizing an aesthetic of the abject, generated through sexual excess and anticipation's affective contours of anxiety, by listening for dissonance, repetition, deferral, and glitched and pitchy sounds. Using the uncertainty and discomfort of anxious anticipation and its coexistence with sex, this article additionally stitches together an edging-as-listening practice to argue that the album's aesthetics of abjection allows the listener to inhabit negativity without the satisfaction of a neat resolution. Instead, this residual negativity undermines the notion of affect as a site of limitless potential for world-making projects, which permeate sound studies and affect theory. Ultimately, this article proposes that if one is to take the anxiety of anticipation's negativity seriously, it provides neither a roadmap for a future world nor quite reaches the dissolution of one. Rather, it joyously approaches the latter in what is described as the fullness of anticipation's jouissance.

KEYWORDS affect, edging-as-listening, Latinx sound studies, trans Latinx studies, anticipation

"Oh shit!" As the opening track of Arca's *Kick iii*, "Bruja" begins with an exaltation mixed with a tinge of uncertainty. The statement is followed by a jolting metallic crash as Arca utters her name in what has become a characteristic affectation with a prolonged rolling of the "r." Taking the elation and doubt that floods the opening statement of the song, tension is built as a syncopated beat matches a rapping of epithets for herself, including "la Doña, la patrona, en esta mierda" [the Madam, the boss, in this bitch].¹ The verses feed off of the pressure of syncopation until by the end of the third verse, Arca transitions into a witchy howl, pausing only to scream to the listener that she wants to "see you fucking bounce!"² A shriek follows with twenty-three down beat crashes and a slight pause to offer relief with the anticipated twenty-fourth smash. Soon enough, the comfort of the percussion disappears with only a final shriek to offer the listener. The shriek enchants you so that you are left waiting, unsure if the percussive rhythms, which at the start of the song had built tension, will provide alleviation. Instead, the song loops a sirenesque sound which is only interrupted by an abrupt end to the song.

1. Arca, "Bruja," track 1 on *Kick iii*, XL Recordings, 2021. Written and produced by Arca.

2. Ibid.

In other tracks on *KiCk iii* and much of her previous body of work, Arca gets off on cacophony.³ Released as part of a five-album series, *KiCk iii* has been described as “a violent headrush” and a “joyous sense of freedom.”⁴ As conveyed in the opening line of “Bruja,” an excitement expressed through sex, excessive and often grisly, characterizes much of the lyrical content of the album. Excessive sexuality and a multifarious anticipation are paired with violence to express a jouissance conveyed by the freedom of the quoted review. This jouissance exemplifies a certain negation to the album’s aesthetics to be thought through alongside the concept of abjection. By abjection, I mean to index the joys and violence within a space of negation and exclusion where the modalities of joy and violence are not mutually exclusive. This article positions *KiCk iii* as operationalizing an aesthetic of the abject, generated through sexual excess and anticipation’s affective contours of anxiety. As an artifact of Latinx cultural production, I hear *KiCk iii* as reveling in anticipation’s negativity (by anticipation I am referring to the negative feeling of waiting and being suspended in the present).⁵ Using the uncertainty and discomfort of anxious anticipation and its coexistence with sex, this article also argues that the album’s aesthetics of abjection allow the listener to inhabit negativity without the satisfaction of a neat resolution; and hears this residual negativity as undermining the notion of affect as a site of limitless potential for world-making projects.

Born in Venezuela, Alejandra Gherzi Rodríguez, also known by her stage name of Arca, is a trans nonbinary musical and performance artist. At the age of three, Arca and her family moved to Connecticut, where they lived for some time before returning to Venezuela. Eventually, Gherzi Rodríguez made her way back to the States where she attended New York University and made her debut as “Arca” in 2012. In 2017, she released her self-titled album where, for the first time, lyricism was introduced to her sonic aesthetic. The album’s haunting melodies add a texture to her previously explored themes of melancholy and transformation. This was followed by her public disclosure in 2018 that she had begun transition.

The simultaneous euphoria and sorrow that Arca has attached to her transition extend further into the series of *KiCk* albums.⁶ Released in 2020, *KiCk i* is a combination of glitch and melody that Arca describes as a reflection of “symbolically, physically, biologically, hormonally, transitioning and moving countries and aging.”⁷ From the opening track “Nonbinary” to “La Chiqui,” her collaborative effort with hyperpop juggernaut

3. All songs discussed in this article are written and produced by Arca. Co-writers and producers are noted in their corresponding endnotes.

4. Michael Cragg, “Arca: KiCk iii Review – a Joyous Sonic Headrush,” *The Guardian*, December 5, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2021/dec/05/arca-kick-iii-review-a-joyous-sonic-headrush>.

5. Throughout this article, other terms such as “apprehension,” “tension,” and “suspension” are similarly used to index the affective silhouette of anticipation.

6. In an Instagram Live, Arca has stated that many focus on dysphoria and transition’s sorrow, but she also considers the joy of it: “I also relish and enjoy the moments that are euphoric, like when you feel the joy of it, it’s joy and sorrow. It’s not just sorrow. It’s not a correction.” For a recording of this live, see MOK, “Arca talks about Transitioning – Instagram Live 5/11/2019,” November 5, 2019, YouTube video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_hu7kKBzVc.

7. Arca, quoted in Steph Kretowicz, “The Alien Inside,” *The Wire*, June 2020.

SOPHIE, the album provides a variety of ways to acquaint oneself with the limits of intelligibility. From “kick” as in kick drum to “kick” as in a sensuous and/or pleasurable effect or experience, the polysemous titles of the series index the ways ambiguity and discomfort can be deployed to coax a listener to inhabit the edges of legibility. My use of edging here is intentional and references the masturbatory sexual practice, whether done alone or not, of stimulation and cessation just before the point of orgasm. By approaching resolution, it extends the negativity of anticipation into the space of sex and sexuality to constitute the listening practice detailed in this article.

Following *KiCK i*, Arca released the second-through-fifth albums on consecutive days between November 30, 2021, and December 3, 2021. In its entirety, the series basks in cacophony, glitchy aesthetics, and consuming ambience. Whether it be the synth-infused reggaeton of *KICK ii*, the industrial dance aesthetics of *KiCK iii*, or the dreamy ambient sounds of *kiCK iiiii*, Arca overwhelms in a way where excess is the point. To interrogate the sonic aesthetics of abjection, anticipation, and its jouissance, this article stitches together a methodology of edging-as-listening to consider how a heterogenous and affective anticipation undermines long-held attributes of negative affect without rearticulating it into a world-making project.

EDGING-AS-LISTENING: LISTENING FOR ANTICIPATION

Listening to “Fiera,” the fourth track from *KiCK iii*, involves four minutes and twenty-nine seconds of lyricless instrumentation. A harsh metallic sound loops alongside layers of percussion that cycle through rhythm patterns and glitchy sonic effects that join in for the repetition. The little structure given to the song involves the percussive kick drum coming in and out in a mixed meter. The layered sounds overwhelm as I anticipate some form of climax to the song. But as the song ends, the layers begin to fall back until the last forty seconds repeat a metronomic click followed by a glitchy sound with no obvious musical referent. The wanting and waiting for relief only fuel a sense of unraveling that the song offers me and other listeners. By unraveling, I gesture towards a sense of being suspended in time with no chorus or climax to look forward to—even after repeated listening. In other words, it is the anxiety and bracing for an encounter with a limit. A quick perusal of the comments for the song on YouTube shows how the song takes the listeners out of themselves, or how it exemplifies an “end of the world soundtrack, in the best way possible.”⁸ “Fiera,” or “Feral,”⁹ is one of a number of songs from *KiCK iii* that experiments with layers of dissonant sounds and percussive beats that exist as counter to normative structures of contemporary popular music. This disorientation as anticipation coexists alongside other musical details that Arca uses to create tension. To characterize this listening more formally, and to listen for anticipation as a method that gives attention

8. To not publish users’ names or usernames, despite their presence in a public forum such as YouTube, I have left the quoted user’s name out. I invite readers to not only listen to the song but to join the community of listeners, which along with who I have quoted, have expressed similar feelings about the song. See Arca, “Arca - Fiera (Audio),” December 1, 2021, YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B9S8v-LfoaU>.

9. This is my translation, other possible options for translation include “fierce,” and “beast.”

to how its affects move away from a positive reworking of negativity, I propose an approach that I call *edging-as-listening*. By edging-as-listening, I seek to outline a method of listening for the ways Arca's music evokes the negativity of anticipation without providing the gratification of relief, or if some form of relief is provided, the building of anticipation outweighs any sense of positive reward, leaving the listener thwarted and suspended in its pressure and pleasure. As a listening practice, edging-as-listening is informed by my attunement to certain details as a queer Latinx listener. Indeed, I similarly take pleasure in listening to the ways negativity can subvert the expectation one might have in *doing something* with that discomfort. But as described below, this attunement also considers the ways anticipation exists as a multifaceted element in Arca's aesthetics.

Edging-as-listening is two-fold: on one level, it listens for anticipation, whether relief is rewarded, and to what extent its negativity is left lingering. At another level, it takes seriously the sexual metaphor of the masturbatory sexual practice. The narrative, and by extension, sexual suspension of edging as practice, provides an approach to the ways anticipation and sex function in the negation of interest in this article. Therefore, in detailing the components of this method of listening, I bring together work from sound studies, Latinx theories on music and listening, queer and trans concepts of music, and porn studies to index a particular attunement towards moments of tension and anxiety that lead nowhere and give nothing.

To revisit "Fiera," the layered sounds of discordance and glitch are given structure through the underlying kick drum in the song. Despite this, the kick drum is played in a mixed meter. The resulting suspense does not disappear for me with every repeat. Josh Kun captures this dynamic as acoustic strangeness, or the idea that "strangeness is identity's uncomfortable, but required double," and therefore it "unsettles identities already in use."¹⁰ Constitutive of this strangeness is that a song contains a newness despite a simultaneous familiarity. Therefore, the anticipation and disorientation of a song such as "Fiera" persists as I listen and am left in suspense. Sometimes it is the looping metallic effects that leave me in a trance. At others, it is the percussive kick drum that drives an anticipation that does not lead me to a gratifying resolution. It is an attention to these details that I listen for, and what I suggest characterizes edging-as-listening.

The details of anxious anticipation are multiple. Therefore, in establishing a listening practice that focuses on such details I rely on Alexandra Vazquez's conceptualization of listening in detail. Among the many components indexed by the listening practice, listening in detail involves the potential for both comfort and violence. There is a co-constitutive relationship between detail and listener, a kind of interpellation that Vazquez describes as an "instant recognition that calls your attention to a musical detail."¹¹ Taking this directive, I similarly hear anticipation as a mode of attunement to future's fraught promises. Whether it is the hypnotic metallic loops of "Fiera" or the howl in "Bruja" that

10. Josh Kun, *Audiotopia: Music, Race, and America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 12.

11. Alexandra T. Vazquez, *Listening in Detail: Performances of Cuban Music* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 29.

leaves listeners suspended and on edge, edging-as-listening hears these details as an orientation to the present and not as a productive site to imagine future worlds.

This proposal of edging as a listening practice shares methodological suggestions similar to Ren Ellis Neyra's multisensorial poetic listening. For Ellis Neyra, poetic listening affords a practice of listening that "sense[s] the queer and improvisational gestures made between brown, black, and white Latinx salsa musicians and audiences."¹² Furthermore, they draw on the sensorial to position poetic listening "as a method that re-imagines Latinx as a riotous movement."¹³ As a listening practice that attends to the ways music invites abnormality and the disruption of neat Latinx aesthetic objects, I listen beside Ellis Neyra's orientation to the ways sound enacts disturbances to what is expected and the negative valences of those outcomes. One of multisensorial poetic listening's processes which most approaches edging-as-listening's practice is that of auscultation. Building from Édouard Glissant's poetics, Ellis Neyra interrogates auscultation as "a mode of listening with/on the verge of, yet not, touching another body."¹⁴ Ellis Neyra employs auscultation to orient poetic listening as a listening with/beside. In other words, it is a relational listening practice structured by a disruption over fixity. Furthermore, the act of listening to thresholds touches a similar affective space as edging. Namely, these affects of anticipation and yearning are a simultaneous pleasure and anxiety—a feeling of being coaxed into a state of wanting resolve while at the same time encountering the nearly unbearable tension involved in that waiting.

With a similar attention to disruption and disorderliness, Deborah Vargas's methodological and analytic of dissonance harmonizes (pun intended) alongside Ellis Neyra's multisensorial poetic listening and the regard for cacophony as a function of anticipation in edging-as-listening. For Vargas, dissonance, "as chaos, cacophony, disharmony, commotion, static—is deployed . . . to symbolize an interruption or disruption" of heteronormativity.¹⁵ Edging-as-listening builds on this power of dissonance and cacophony to generate a non-generative anticipation. In other words, it locates the power of negativity as a mode of feeling that requires a consideration on its own terms, rather than as a set of affects that can be neatly folded into coherent misrecognitions of world-making agendas that lean on an affirmation of the same structures that may have rendered the dissonant Chicanas of Vargas's archive or the riotous Latinxs of Ellis Neyra's project their negative affective valence in the first place.

Having outlined the ways edging-as-listening co-mingles with the various contributions above, I also want to detail the ways in which it diverges from the politics of those methodologies and concepts through the (non)function of anxious anticipation's negativity. While anticipation and its relation to both abjection and the literature on affect are

12. Ren Ellis Neyra, "Salsa's Unruly Audition: Abnormal Feelings for the 1970s Fania All-Stars," *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 31, no. 1 (2019): 68.

13. *Ibid.*, 68.

14. Ren Ellis Neyra, *The Cry of the Senses: Listening to Latinx and Caribbean Poetics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020), 17.

15. Deborah R. Vargas, *Dissonant Divas in Chicana Music: The Limits of La Onda* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), xiv.

more thoroughly surveyed in the following sections, the detail of anticipation that I want to highlight briefly here is that of its relationship, or lack thereof, to the idea that its sonic aesthetics can be easily listened to as a site of possibility. To return to Josh Kun's notion of acoustic strangeness, I take the threads of strangeness' destabilization of identity as a site of discomfort without the ethic of possibility which Kun couches in his larger conceptualization of audiotopia. For Kun, audiotopia refers to the ways "music functions like a possible utopia for the listener," and how music and songs "are almost-places of cultural encounter that may not be physical places but nevertheless exist in their own auditory somewhere."¹⁶ Therefore, the discomfort of acoustic strangeness as a site of encounter is framed by the logic that this meeting is a location where music provides the maps to the possible worlds that can be created by the imagining instigated by the songs themselves. I do not seek to discount such an ethic of possibility wholesale, particularly because I agree with Kun that popular music is a complicated scene of negotiation characterized by ambivalence and contradiction. Rather, I am articulating that certain aesthetics, such as Arca's use of anticipation, do not offer such roadmaps of possibility when the tension built in the process is not so neatly resolved.

Similarly, Vazquez's listening in detail assembles an ethic of possibility in her interpretation of Cuban America's sounds. Using two documentary films about popular music in Cuba—Rogelio París's *Nosotros, la música* (1963) and Sara Gómez's *Y . . . tenemos sabor* (1967)—Vazquez suggests that the films "offer some of the hopeful particularities that would come to pass in the rupture," the rupture here being between Cuba and the United States after the Cuban Revolution of 1959.¹⁷ The "hopeful particularities" here specifically refer to how the films expose "the impossible project of forging a coherent or singular 'we' for the Cuban nation state" which Vazquez also extends to Cuban America more broadly.¹⁸ Vazquez sees and listens to these films as "performed responses" with "great possibility for any reparative work in the post-rupture."¹⁹ I want to highlight that the repair which Vazquez locates here is one that I see as politically fruitful, namely one that "abandon[s] a coherent or singular Cubanness, and [finds] other kinds of models in music."²⁰ With edging-as-listening, I similarly take incoherence as a given and not something to be overcome. However, Vazquez locates within the analyzed films possibilities for a future that looks towards the past for its material basis of potentiality. I take incoherence as an intersubjective encounter that is not always knowable. It is strange, to echo Kun, rather than familiar. Therefore, an incoherence that is the result of an encounter, in this case I speak to the encounter with anxious anticipation through Arca's *KiK iii*, is one that does not have the familiarity with a past to craft potentials for a future. It insists on a suspension in the present, giving *nothing* as a site of affective possibility. Listening to this anxious anticipation, edging-as-listening both recognizes the pleasure and pain of an

16. Josh Kun, *Audiotopia: Music, Race, and America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 2–3.

17. Alexandra T. Vazquez, *Listening in Detail: Performances of Cuban Music* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 200.

18. *Ibid.*, 200.

19. *Ibid.*, 200.

20. *Ibid.*, 200.

uncertainty akin to the joys of sexual ecstasy and the anxiety that the unraveling of such an enjoyment will include an encounter with the negativity of incoherence.

Finally, both Ellis Neyra and Vargas construct their listening approaches with a similar attention to possibility. For Ellis Neyra, multisensorial poetic listening provides a moment for readjustment characterized by “copulations of possibility” where sonic disturbances “offer emotional refuges to imaginatively avow submerged sensorial solidarities *inter alia* that elude violent, mono-human, liberal economic sovereignty.”²¹ In dissonance, Vargas constructs this ethical frame by ascribing on to the analytic the capacity “to understand the ways music has the power to reimagine histories, social identities, pleasure, and possibilities for resistance, as well as to rework complex notions of complicity, negotiation, spatiality, travel, and transnational cultural flows.”²² I argue the practice of reimagining social identities also produces the project of reworking the negativity of, in this case, dissonance into an ethic which hinges on the logic of repair. While Ellis Neyra similarly sees the destabilization of the sonics in their study as a site of possibility, I do want to consider that their formulation of the cry as “a sonic disturbance of Enlightenment, Romantic, and plantation orders of the senses” more closely resonates with the anxieties of anticipation.²³ Namely, they situate the poetics of the cry as “play[ing] with, rather than resolving or rationalizing, Western philosophy’s rendering of cries as vibrating . . . in the crack forced between (black) animality and (white) humanity.”²⁴ In other words, Ellis Neyra rejects the humanist project of having disruption cohere into a wholeness and instead positions the cry as “disarticulat[ing] the joints in sound that constitute articulation, that is, they expose the nonsense in sense.”²⁵ Edging-as-listening is correspondingly oriented around how the sonic aesthetics of anticipation undermine Western humanist logics of sovereign subjectivity. To bring back a previous point on incoherence, the joy and negativity that I locate in anxious anticipation can be understood alongside what queer theorist Lee Edelman attributes to the ambivalence of sex where “the closer we come to enjoyment, the greater our need to defend against—to defend our putative sovereignty against the negativity that empties it out.”²⁶ This relationship between anticipation, non-sovereignty, and the musical encounter with incoherence will be explored further in the following sections.

Having outlined where my listening approach to anticipatory aesthetics sits within scholarly work on popular music and Latinx sound studies, I want to consider the sexual metaphor of edging within my proposed listening practice and its relationship to anticipation. To reiterate, edging is the masturbatory sex act—done either by oneself or with multiple participants—whereby orgasm is delayed to induce a prolonged state of sexual

21. Ren Ellis Neyra, *The Cry of the Senses: Listening to Latinx and Caribbean Poetics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020), 17.

22. Deborah R. Vargas, *Dissonant Divas in Chicana Music: The Limits of La Onda* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), xiii.

23. Ellis Neyra, *The Cry of the Senses*, 16.

24. *Ibid.*, 18.

25. *Ibid.*, 20.

26. Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman, *Sex, or the unbearable* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 8.

arousal. In *The Pleasure of the Text*, Roland Barthes situates jouissance, or bliss, as the unspeakable and incompleteness evoked by the erotics of a text. One of the erotics Barthes ruminates on is that of edges. Using the case of the Marquis de Sade, Barthes likens the division of language in the text as resulting in an edge which follows convention and a fluid one “which is never anything but the site of its effect: the place where death of language is glimpsed.”²⁷ The sexual metaphor comes (pun intended) as a provocation that positions pleasure as “the site of a loss, the seam, the cut, the deflation, the *dissolve* which seizes the subject in the midst of bliss.”²⁸ It is not lost on me that the dissolve which grabs the reader, in my case the listener, reflects the language of reactions to *KicK iii* where there is a likening to a feeling of unraveling intimately linked to a sense of being overwhelmed.²⁹ Therefore, edging-as-listening is attuned to the details which function in building anticipation where the dissolve on the edge of bliss is interpreted as a resolve to a tension that offers little gratification.

Building on the details of edging, I want to consider the ways narrative is played with as a practice of edging to bridge it to a musical analog. Barthes attributes to the subversive edge a flexible style where “narrativity is dismantled yet the story is still readable.”³⁰ A shuffling of conventional narrative is a quality of the sexual metaphor at play here as exemplified in the work of porn studies scholar Kevin Bozelka. Bozelka examines the work of Jerry Douglas, whose video productions on edging mimic the practice in its narrative form where the conventional use of the “money” or “cum shot” in pornographic film never arrives. Without the adherence to the customary cum shot to structure the narrative of Douglas’s films, Bozelka attends to how the abrupt ending “to these films serves less to solidify a diegetic reality than to perpetuate an ambient edginess” whereby the viewer is left to “occupy an eternal present.”³¹ This suspension of pleasure that would otherwise convert to a gratification coheres the ways a song such as “Fiera” defers any sort of climax until the ending gives nothing more than a series of metronomic clicks.

Beyond the scrambling of structure where songs build up to a climax, Arca deploys other elements that contribute to anticipation. To assist in outlining these details I turn to the work of music theorist David Huron. In his work on the ways music evokes emotions through the psychology of expectation, Huron details five systems of response—imagination, tension, prediction, reaction, and appraisal. Of interest here is that of the tension phase where a listener is prepared for an anticipated event. The tension phase can be marked by an “uncertainty about what will happen, and uncertainty about when it will happen.”³² Whether the thing anticipated is understood to be “good”

27. Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), 6.

28. *Ibid.*, 7.

29. For examples of this language of euphoria and the sense of being overwhelmed by Arca’s *Kick* series, see Alexis Petridis, “Arca: *Kick ii, iii, iiiii, iiiiii* Review – a Wild Ride to the Dark, Daring Side of Pop,” *The Guardian*, December 3, 2021. <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2021/dec/03/arca-kick-ii-iii-iiii-iiiii-review>.

30. Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, 9.

31. Kevin John Bozelka, “Nothing for Nothing: Edging as Filmic Structure in the Films of Jerry Douglas,” *Porn Studies* vol. 8, no. 2 (2021): 180.

32. David Huron, *Sweet Anticipation: Music and the Psychology of Expectation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 9.

or “bad,” there is an anxiety and stress which accompanies anticipation. Huron details a variety of methods used to evoke feelings of anticipation in music, including delay, high pitch, loudness, and dissonant sonorities. While Huron notes that dissonance here is often used by music theorists “to refer to the subjective feeling that accompanies the sense of a need for resolution,” I want to fold in that which is indexed by the analytic of dissonance as described by Vargas.³³ This includes the disruption of heteronormativity through the dissonant sounds and the resulting negativity.

These details are the elements by which edging-as-listening is attuned to. The looped metallic scratches of “Fiera” function in the delay of any sort of anticipated climax, on top of the dissonance of what my description of “scratching” can convey. The multifarious anticipation is increased as dissonance indicates an oncoming climax in conventional Western musical structure. However, as Huron notes, the delay of such elements which play on prediction can become thwarted expectations, or the convergence of musical manipulations which “generate stress through a negatively valenced prediction response.”³⁴ This is important as not all anticipation can be negatively valenced. For example, high predictability of an oncoming resolution, such as that of the beat drop in conventional dance music forms, builds stress in ways that can be experienced as pleasurable because of the high predictability of the beat drop. But Huron notes that the “greatest stress arises when an event is unexpected,” a stress tied to high uncertainty over predictability.³⁵ In the case of thwarted expectations, both stressors are mobilized, and it is such emotional valence which I read in edging as a listening practice. In “Fiera,” this is also exemplified in Arca’s use of the kick drum, where the pleasure in its ordering of cacophonous sounds ends up contributing to the dissonance with a change in meter—thwarting the listeners’ expectations of resolution.

Finally, I want to bridge the scrambling of narrative with anticipation. Having briefly addressed this dynamic under the label of thwarted expectation, Huron notes that musical climaxes rely on “high sensory dissonance, high physiological arousal, high physiological stress, and vivid feelings of anticipation” which coalesce around feelings of euphoria.³⁶ Huron goes on to liken this to sexual orgasm, however, as if the connection needed to be coaxed, when the climax is delayed, tension floods the listener as with the cessation of sexual stimulation in edging. How does this end? For “Fiera,” the metronomic clicks at the end of the song are functional in the giving of nothing that edging-as-listening is oriented towards. This delay tactic is emblematic of what Huron highlights as the fade-out, where the end of the song is “replaced by a gesture toward the ‘infinite.’”³⁷ Not all the songs in *Kick iii* utilize the same delay tactic to further play with structure. However, plenty scramble a song’s ending to similarly compound the leftover anticipatory anxieties built up throughout. For example, “Skullqueen,” also a track without a climax, converts what I listen as the incoming closure to the song, characterized by a looped

33. Ibid., 310.

34. Ibid., 325.

35. Ibid., 325.

36. Ibid., 326.

37. Ibid., 318.

pitchy descending scalar set of notes and sound effects of a firing shotgun with its casing hitting the floor, to an abrupt ending with an ascending set of shrill notes. “Electra Rex,” the track following “Skullqueen,” provides a lyrical analog to the abrupt cessations explored in this section where Arca closes the song repeating: “Should I blow? / Should I blow? / Should I blow? / Should I? / Should I? / Should I? / Should I blow? / Should I? / Should I?”³⁸ Considering that the lyrics of the song leading up to this closing stanza are a description of sex that borders on morbidity, the “should I blow?” is on one level an obvious reference to the onset of orgasm. The song ends with this string of questions as if enacting the sexual act of edging reminiscent of Bolzelka’s analysis. Abandoning metaphor and converting the edging to its literal meaning, I move into a consideration of the way anticipation functions alongside sex in Arca’s *KiCK iii* to provide an encounter with abjection.

ANTICIPATION-AS-ABJECTION OR THE TEMPORALITY OF WANTING AND WAITING FOR WHAT HURTS

Starting with eerie acoustic effects, “My 2,” the tenth track on the album, transitions from a haunting start to a sticky synth. The sonics are accompanied by repeated phrases: “You want it / I can hit, rip it, kill it, slit it / I want it / I can hit it, whip it, kill it slow.” The morbidity of the lyrics function with the sonic aesthetics of incoherence in a way that approaches Jack Halberstam’s imagined violence, where it scrambles a sense of reality.³⁹ Accompanying this imagined violence is a glitchy modulated pitch of Arca’s voice, which is reminiscent of what pop music writer Sasha Geffen describes as Arca’s ability to suture “the conceptual gap between trans bodies and trans sounds.”⁴⁰ About midway through the song—again, one without a conventional structure—the layers assemble as Arca adds a buzzing vocal that will linger until the end of the track. The “zzing” of the vocal wisps in and out while the cacophonous coalescence of sounds masks a faint set of questions in the outro: “When will you come? / When? When will you come? / When will you come?”⁴¹ In what can be heard as a classic thwarting of expectations for the song’s ending, Arca abruptly halts with a final “zz” leaving me with an unresolved tension that had been pieced together. Edged as a listener, I am left with “nothing” in the sense that a pleasure of resolution is replaced with a deferred pleasure of the indeterminate. Taking together the anxious anticipation of Arca’s *KiCK iii* and its sexual aesthetics, I situate these two details

38. Arca, “Electra Rex,” track 6 on *KiCK iii*, XL Recordings, 2021. Written and produced by Arca.

39. Jack Halberstam, “Imagined Violence/Queer Violence: Representation, Rage, and Resistance,” *Social Text* vol. 37, no. 37 (1993): 187–201. The violence in lyrical content here is conceptualized in relation to an incoherence which speaks to Halberstam’s description of imagined violence as the power “not to represent but to destabilize the real.”

40. Sasha Geffen, *Glitter up the Dark: How Pop Music Broke the Binary* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2020), 213. While Geffen’s listening of Arca’s aesthetics from her previous album, *Xen* (2014), drives this association of “trans bodies” to “trans sounds,” I listen to Arca less as an expression of a universal trans subject and more so as an expression of a gendered non-normativity. By extension, I do not subscribe to a notion of closure between embodiment and sonic aesthetics, rather, I bring in Geffen’s assessment of Arca’s voice and sound to exemplify how she’s listened to by a wider audience as scrambling normativity in her musical productions.

41. Arca, “My 2,” track 10 on *KiCK iii*, XL Recordings, 2021. Written and produced by Arca.

as constituting an aesthetic of abjection that facilitates a negation which beckons the listener to the limit of dissolution.

Julia Kristeva describes abjection's lattice of psychical energy not as an object but nonetheless as being in opposition to a legible and coherent "I." From this space of negation, the abject is that which "disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. [It is the] in-between, the ambiguous" and a troubling immanence that "beckons to us and ends up engulfing us."⁴² To put it differently, abjection is that which is excluded and banished to a void where meaning is lost as an ontological unintelligibility. In its form of exclusion and negation, the queer, trans, and/or Latina subject has been long theorized in her/their figuration of the abject.⁴³ Arca's use of the queer/trans Latina subject as a figuration of the abject certainly appears across the *Kick* series, particularly in *KICK ii* through an invocation of the transformista in the song "Prada" and what can be described as the "Venezuelanness" of the tracks "Rakata" and "Tiro," where the former features and invokes the furruco (a traditional Venezuelan friction drum whose sound is likened to an animal's roar upon being rubbed with fingers or a stick) and the latter recites Venezuelan place names to a high tempo dembow beat.⁴⁴ However, this article's preoccupation with abjection is concerned with the affects of anticipation and sex.

As with the looped industrial sound effects of "Fiera," the glitchy lyrics and warped sound effects of "My 2" are echoed so that each repetition defers the uncertain ending of the song. This detail of deferral generates an anxious anticipation with no resolution until the end of the song. When I listen to this track, the energy that builds and is quickly terminated results in a leftover tension that could only be expressed with a sense of suspension. Suspension with growing anticipation resonates with Kristeva's characterization of abjection as the signifier for the experience of wanting. Here, the wanting is for the impossible characterized by jouissance. Specifically, I point to the jouissance of

42. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 4.

43. For a discussion on the abject Latina mother and Latinx abject aesthetics as a strategy to underscore the limits of assimilation and hegemonic forms of inclusion see Leticia Alvarado, *Abject Performances: Aesthetic Strategies in Latino Cultural Production* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018). See Juana María Rodríguez, *Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures, and Other Latina Longings* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), for an exploration of the racialized and gendered forms of abjection for the Latina subject and its association with the shame and pleasure of an erotic racial sexual abjection. For a continued discussion on how Latina subjects function as the bearers of shame and abjection through the figure of the puta, see Juana María Rodríguez, *Putas: Seeing Latinas, Working Sex* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2023). Finally, for an examination of Latina sexuality, objecthood, and feminine jouissance, see Amber Jamilla Musser, *Sensual Excess: Queer Femininity and Brown Jouissance* (New York: New York University Press, 2018).

44. As a term used to describe (and at times used by) Venezuelan women who are assigned male at birth and transform their bodies as part of a transitional process, transformistas occupy an abject space of exclusion and violence. For more on transformista self-fashioning and its relation to an embodiment of Venezuelan modernity, see Marcia Ochoa, *Queen for a Day: Transformistas, Beauty Queens, and the Performance of Femininity in Venezuela*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014). "Venezuelanness," here references the work of Irina Troconis where it indexes the ways aesthetics craft an in-betweenness of "what is happening 'over there' and what is happening 'over here' that ultimately re-presents Venezuela" through otherwise invisible figures. For more on a discussion on Venezuelanness, see Irina R. Troconis, "Crafting Nationness: DIY Venezuela in Deborah Castillo's RAW and Violette Bule's REQUIEM200," *Latin American Research Review* vol. 56, no. 2 (2021): 437–56.

transgression by which Jacques Lacan sees as providing access to an excitement which is an impossible pleasure.⁴⁵ Kristeva likens this jouissance to that “which the subject is swallowed up but in which the Other, in return, keeps the subject from foundering by making it repugnant.”⁴⁶ A yearning characteristic of being suspended in time is therefore of interest here, particularly scholarly work on how queer/trans and/or Latinx subjects have mobilized an aesthetic of waiting and wanting as sites of pleasure and pain find resonance with the anticipation-as-abjection that I am highlighting.

The negativity of anticipation I am engaged with here corresponds with the idea of “future fatigue” for transgender subjects experiencing transition, as developed by Hil Malatino. Malatino interrogates the affective narratives which follow a teleological structure of a self “pre” and “post” transition where he ascribes onto such narratives an “affective surround . . . of anticipation, in all its tense complexity, with all the desire, hope, fear, and dread that anticipation entails.”⁴⁷ Critiquing this narrative of transition as utopian, Malatino underscores the incompleteness of subjectivity exposed through such narratives. As a process characterized by negativity which forces an encounter with the non-sovereignty of intersubjective misrecognition, I see the anxious anticipation of transition as echoing the negativity within the aesthetics of *KiCk iii*. The non-sovereignty of intersubjective misrecognition described here is that which Malatino identifies as the lack of control one has in their own perception by others—namely in the process of transition. Arca similarly speaks to the non-sovereignty of transition by likening it to the transition towards death where a fleeting choice lies “between having that static inside of you and not sharing it, and moving the static outward and into your environment.”⁴⁸ Taking together then the affective structure of *KiCk iii* with an attention to anticipation and the negation which undergirds it as abjection, I suggest that the experience of feeling edged as a listener is the result of the “moving the static outward” as Arca succinctly stated.⁴⁹

To return to the sonic looping, its sense of stasis, and its relation to abjection, I hear *KiCk iii* as enacting an aesthetic which attunes the listener to the limits of intelligibility. Considering the loop and its relation to affect, I turn to Amber Musser, who sees the suspension of the loop as an approach to the pleasures of orgasm. Viewing the work of Nao Bustamante and Patty Chang, who both employ the loop in their video installations, Musser positions their aesthetics within the realm of brown jouissance, where one “waver[s] between abjection, pleasure, and pleasure in abjection that exceeds the matrix

45. Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1992).

46. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 9.

47. Hil Malatino, *Side Affects: On Being Trans and Feeling Bad* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2022), 23–24.

48. Arca, quoted in Frankie Dunn, “Arca on Creating KiCk i, Transitioning and the Beauty of Livestreaming,” *i-D*, June 25, 2020, <https://i-d.vice.com/en/article/4ayayj/arca-were-all-transitioning-from-birth-to-death-its-inevitable>.

49. While it is unclear what version of “static” Arca is referring to in the quote, I see the ambiguity as helpful in that I take it to mean both “static” as denoting immobility and stillness, and “static” as in the noise produced in electric disturbances.

of overdetermination.”⁵⁰ As an ethic, “brown jouissance is part of this insistence on feeling with the moment against the demand to present feeling in accordance with the norms of chronology.”⁵¹ The comfort of brown jouissance is a wavering that, on the level of the sensorial, speaks to edging as a listening practice which I place beside what Sandra Ruiz calls a “scenography of waiting.”⁵² By looking at the work of artist Ryan Rivera and his use of the loop, Ruiz ascribes onto this waiting a politics which considers it as “not a neutral act: it is a political existence for a Rican and queer subject whose intersubjective encounters are framed by states of perceived incompleteness, negation, and lack.”⁵³ I situate my ruminations on anticipation and its felt tensions in temporal effects alongside both Musser and Ruiz, as I hear both the pleasure of its negativity as abjection, and the felt incompleteness as constitutive of *KicK iii*’s aesthetics. The listener inhabits this incompleteness in a suspended swirl where the external object becomes scrambled with the self as the limits of the self’s boundary is sonically reached.

To loop back to Kristeva, I want to consider anticipation and its associations with feelings of suspension, waiting, and the aesthetics of the loop alongside her account of music and rhythm. Abjection has largely been considered within the scope of literature or the visual analysis of aesthetic objects. However, in following Arca’s logic of externalizing the static within, I listen to the detail of dissonance and its role in anticipation as a rejection of the ways song and rhythm can order that which it arouses. In her reflection of Aristotelian catharsis, Kristeva suggests that music “arouse[s] the impure, the other of mind, the passionate-corporeal-sexual-virile, but they harmonize it, arrange it differently than the wise man’s knowledge does.”⁵⁴ Rather than harmonizing the impurities of dissonance through a process of purification, the arousal of anticipatory anxieties in *KicK iii* build until the offered resolution, often in the form of the song’s ending, gives nothing of the warmth attributed to purification. The looping of harsh, glitchy, and metallic sonic effects corresponds to a mimesis of the abject, which Kristeva describes as a “repetition through rhythm and song, therefore through what is not yet, or no longer is ‘meaning,’ but arranges, *defers*, differentiates and organizes (emphasis added).”⁵⁵

Lingering on deferral and a lingering characteristic of the suspension in anxious anticipation, *KicK iii*’s aesthetic challenges listeners to consider what is bearable in listening to the dissonant and cacophonous sonics of the album. This is especially true as I listen to “Señorita,” the ninth track on the album, which leans on syncopated percussion layered under Arca’s vocals. The first stanza, to be repeated a second time,

50. Amber Jamilla Musser, *Sensual Excess: Queer Femininity and Brown Jouissance* (New York: New York University Press, 2018), 141.

51. Ibid., 127.

52. Sandra Ruiz, *Ricanness: Enduring Time in Anticolonial Performance* (New York: New York University Press, 2019), 136.

53. Ibid., 136. I want to highlight another layer of connection here between Ruiz’s characterization of Rivera’s work as that which exposes the queer Rican subject’s intersubjective encounters as “framed by states of perceived incompleteness, negation, and lack,” and the non-sovereignty of intersubjective misrecognition Hil Malatino ascribes onto the negativity of anticipation in transition explored earlier.

54. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 28.

55. Ibid., 4.

includes Arca rapping the lyrics: “Bitch, I get wrapped up in some shit / Not sure who you think you’re dealing with / Phlegm spit in your open hole before I cum in it / Pullin’ it out then returnin’ it / Like this is a revenant / All these other bitches are irrelevant / Heaven-sent.”⁵⁶ Before the enunciation of the “phlegm,” Arca vocalizes the hawking and spitting of phlegm in what I hear as the externalization characteristic of abject aesthetics. It is an externalization of the impurities ascribed to music, but one that is not driven by a logic of purification. Instead, it further abjects by having the listener encounter their sense of boundary.⁵⁷ After the stanza is repeated a second time, the last two lines are looped over a complete breakdown as the percussion drops out and the only sound remaining is a harsh winding robotic effect. Following a short pause, the syncopated beat returns with a layer of vocals repeating “Qué gusto / qué susto [what pleasure / what horror].”⁵⁸ Upon testing the listener on their limit of bearing the chaos, the percussion drops one last time with a vocalization of a “smack” and a soft ambient background of sound emerges with Arca singing “La señorita, yeh, eh / Hey, la señorita [The girl, yeah, eh / Hey, the girl].” The swirling of Arca’s vocals, the soft ambience, and a lingering static effect close out the song in a way that is incoherent with the rest of the song’s aesthetics. This provocation between the aesthetic object and the listener finds resonance in the ways Sandra Ruiz has described the mediated ontology of the spectator for the work of Ryan Rivera where Ruiz sees spectators as “bodily supplements . . . to funnel chaos, love, pain, and empathy through the affective and visceral barriers we wish to sustain.”⁵⁹ I similarly hear *KiCK iii* as using the listener to drive them towards the edge, the limit of a pleasure that brushes up against a destabilizing anxiety which risks finding no reprieve. Taking the negativity of this anticipation seriously and interrogating whether it coheres with other affects in their limitless ability to be mined for affirmation and new possibilities, the final section considers the fraught question of anticipation’s (non)role in such a worlding process.

THE NOTHING OF ANTICIPATION’S NEGATIVITY

Reflecting on “Electra Rex,” a song previously mentioned, Arca states:

In Alchemical terms I propose a new archetype, a nonbinary myth updated for the present and future in service of nonbinary modes of relating to Greek tragedy. If Oedipus Rex kills the father and inadvertently has sex with the mother, and Electra is the opposite—killing the mother and inadvertently having sex with the father, Electra Rex is the union of masculine and feminine. It kills both mother and father and has sex with itself.⁶⁰

56. Arca, “Señorita,” track 9 on *KiCK iii*, XL Recordings, 2021. Written and produced by Arca and Machinedrum.

57. When I first listened to “Señorita,” I remember flinching the first time hearing the hawking of phlegm.

58. Ibid.

59. Sandra Ruiz, *Ricanness: Enduring Time in Anticolonial Performance* (New York: New York University Press, 2019), 152.

60. This quote is part of an Instagram caption for a still from the music video for “Electra Rex.” See Arca (@arcarooooo), “In Alchemical terms I propose a new archetype, a nonbinary myth updated for the present and

Lyrically, “Electra Rex,” most vividly exemplifies this crafted mythology through the opening set of lyrics whose glitchy sonics index the very glitching of normative psychosexual constructs: “Electra Rex complex / Dismember flexed on deck / Tech-tech-tectonic atónita [stunned] girl flex / Are you wildin’ while we warp the text? / . . . / Didn’t we mention that we would fuck it up best?”⁶¹ This scrambling, or warping, of narratives expresses the transgressive aesthetics of the album. The voidal space of abjection is externalized through the lyrical references of sex and violence, all while the sonics that have been examined above contribute to generating complex pleasures of anxious anticipation. I listen to the figuration of this space through transness, as exemplified by this section’s opening quote, to reconsider the normative narratives of relationality through the invocation of Electra Rex having sex with themselves. Specifically, the negativity experienced within the non-sovereignty of intersubjective misrecognition as detailed by Malatino finds resonance with the ways *Kick iii* fills the listener with a sense of suspension that glitches the coherence of futurity. In this last section, I consider what I have explored above as Arca’s aesthetics of anticipation-as-abjection by questioning its existence within the discourse of limitless affects for world-making possibilities. I listen to the musical nothingness I have articulated through the gesture of being edged as a listener to suggest that if one is to take the anxiety of anticipation’s negativity seriously, it provides neither a roadmap for a future world nor quite reaches the dissolution of one. Rather, I suggest that it joyously approaches the latter in what I describe as the fullness of anticipation’s jouissance.

Anxious anticipation has long been theorized as a negative affect.⁶² In her monumental essay for the field of affect theory, Eve Sedgwick considers anticipation as a key dimension of paranoid reading practices.⁶³ Namely, the idea that there could be no bad surprises when it comes to structural critique because anything that would constitute a bad surprise is always-already known. The temporality of such an imperative creates what Sedgwick calls “a complex relation to temporality that burrows both backward and forward.”⁶⁴ While Sedgwick considers this temporal dimension in relation to the organization of knowledge, I see this pulling between the past and the future as a rearticulation of the suspension in time characteristic of anticipation. Additionally, building from the work of Silvan Tomkins and Melanie Klein, Sedgwick names paranoia a strong theory of

future in service of nonbinary modes of relating to Greek tragedy,” *Instagram*, November 9, 2021, https://www.instagram.com/p/CWDzIAU1sb/?img_index=1.

61. Arca, “Electra Rex,” track 6 on *Kick iii*, XL Recordings, 2021. Written and produced by Arca.

62. The field of affect theory often makes distinctions on what constitutes “affect” versus “emotion,” and/or “feeling.” In this article, I do not make a distinction between these terms since these distinctions often hinge on whether the working theory of affect is defined as being some variation of “beyond consciousness.” This debate is beyond the interest of this article, although I follow scholarly work that similarly makes no distinction between these terms or uses them interchangeably. For examples of this approach, see Ann Cvetkovich, *Depression: A Public Feeling* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012) and Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

63. See “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You’re So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay is About You,” in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 123–51.

64. *Ibid.*, 130.

negativity in that the anxious anticipation of paranoia “continue[s] to pursue the self-reinforcing because self-defeating strategies for *forestalling pain*” as opposed to the strategies of repair.⁶⁵ Therefore, what I put forward in considering anticipation in Arca’s *Kick iii* is to ask: What changes when we consider anxious anticipation’s negativity, and the jouissance of that negativity as such, without narrativizing it into a logic that relies on excluding that negativity?

A similar question has been raised in critique of this tendency in affect theory by Tyrone Palmer. Namely, Palmer outlines the ways affect relies on a logic of affirmation which makes its generativity and productive capacity imperative.⁶⁶ Palmer positions Blackness as what allows for the categories of affect to cohere around these logics of affirmation and productivity. By extension, the structure which undergirds the logic of world-building is one that “render[s] affect’s function as solely in the production of the World, it disallows the possibility of affect outside and against the world; of nonrelational affect; of Black affect.”⁶⁷ Taking seriously a critique of the ways affect relies on both an intersubjective relation and a relation to the World, my inquiry resonates with Palmer’s commitment to the idea of “Blackness as the limit case of relation(ality).”⁶⁸ Specifically, my use of “resonance” here is meant to convey that the anticipation-as-abjection that I interrogate in this article through the sonic aesthetics of Arca’s work similarly listens to such negativity as a limit case for the world-building logics of affect. It is not meant to connote the idea that this anticipation-as-abjection, and its bearing on trans Latinaness, provides the same structural critique that a consideration of Blackness does. Rather, the resonance is in how my inquiry hears the negativity of anticipation-as-abjection as a similar limit case to affect’s generativity—not to a congruence in the sociality of Blackness and trans Latinaness.

This article is situated within this line of inquiry, which asks: What happens when we consider the negativity of anticipation that is simultaneously articulated with pleasure in the scrambling between the sonic aesthetics of *Kick iii* and the listener as I have described above? Taking negativity and its relation to sex directly, Lee Edelman, in his dialogue with Lauren Berlant, ascribes onto negativity “the psychic and social incoherences and divisions, conscious and unconscious alike, that trouble any totality or fixity of identity. It denotes, that is, the relentless force that unsettles the fantasy of sovereignty.”⁶⁹ In other words, the negativity at hand considers a stymied agency, as opposed to positive affects that are generally those associated with the gratification of modalities such as coherence, fixity, and normativity. The ruse of sovereignty I hear in *Kick iii*’s negative anticipation coincides with the non-sovereignty reintroduced at the top of this section through Arca’s

65. Ibid., 137. While Sedgwick marks this distinction between paranoia and repair, this does not come with a distinction between a pessimistic versus an optimistic approach as both are likely to be pessimistic.

66. Tyrone S. Palmer, “Affect and Affirmation,” in *The Affect Theory Reader 2: Worldings, Tensions, Futures*, ed. Gregory J. Seigworth and Carolyn Pedwell, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2023), 122–40.

67. Tyrone S. Palmer, “Otherwise than Blackness: Feeling, World, Sublimation,” *Qui Parle* 29, no. 2 (2020): 248–49.

68. Ibid., 249.

69. Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman, *Sex, or the unbearable* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), vii–viii.

rumination on a trans nonbinary retelling of the Oedipal complex. Additionally, I listen to the non-sovereignty of a troubled identity as echoing the strangeness introduced earlier as constitutive of edging as a listening practice. This non-sovereignty “invokes the psychoanalytic notion of the subject’s constitutive division that keeps us, as subjects, from fully knowing or being in control of ourselves and that prompts our misrecognition of our own desires.”⁷⁰ At this point in the article, I have underscored that the anticipatory aesthetics of the album, its coterminous existence with lyrical expressions of sex, and the way they invite the listener to listen on edge are indicative of the incoherence of non-sovereign subjectivity. Rather than take this negativity and fold it into the affirmation of a possible new world, I suggest the lack of meaningful resolve in *KiCK iii*’s tracks invite us to encounter what it means to reach that abject space of rejection and exclusion.

The textures of what I am arriving to here, namely the sonic aesthetics that bring the listener to encounter the edge of abject exclusion, have been largely articulated through the act of being informed by, but never fully arriving at an argument that these affective provocations can be understood as the “trans Latina” sounds by a trans Latina artist. This is because the negativity I index here is not one that can be attributed to a figural trans Latina that is similarly invoked in an articulation of a queer/trans futurity.⁷¹ To do so would be to ontologize that negativity into a form that this logic—that of world-building possibilities—seeks to expel. This is why I attribute the anxious anticipation of Arca’s aesthetics as a *giving of nothing*. This is a nothing that indexes both the desired resolution that never quite reaches its orgasmic completion, and one that suggests that the lingering negativity is unproductive in an attempt to fold it into a generative world-making potentiality.

The title of this article is a reference to a lyric from “Sanctuary,” a song from *kiCK iiiii*, the last album in the *KiCK* series. In collaboration with the late Ryuichi Sakamoto, the melancholic sonics of the song are accompanied at one point by Sakamoto speaking the phrase: “To recognize the alien within / Dignity in the abject.”⁷² Bridging this term, “dignity,” with the thread I am teasing out here, I turn to the “dignity of the Thing” as described by Jacques Lacan. *Das Ding*, or the Thing, is the voidal space of radical exclusion which is marked by the subject coming into being by language. To invoke Lacan, it is a lost object “to be found at the most as something missed. One doesn’t find it, but only its pleasurable association. It is in this state of wishing for it and waiting for it that, in the name of the pleasure principle, the optimum tension will be sought.”⁷³ It is this wishing for and waiting for which articulates a particular affective yearning that characterizes the *jouissance* of anticipation I have been outlining in this article. While not

70. Ibid., viii.

71. For an example of how Arca’s *KiCK* series has been listened to through this articulation of queer futurity through the figure of the mutant, see Antonio Córdoba, “A Mutant Faith: Science Fiction, Posthumanism, and Queer Futurity in Arca’s *KiCK* Album Pentology,” in *Posthumanism and Latin(x) American Science Fiction*, ed. Antonio Córdoba and Emily A. Maguire (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), 219–35.

72. Arca, “Sanctuary (feat. Ryuichi Sakamoto),” track 7 on *kiCK iiiii*, XL Recordings, 2021. Written and produced by Arca.

73. Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, 52.

knowable as an object, the process of sublimation allows for the positivization of the Thing, or as Lacan describes: “it [sublimation] raises an object . . . to the dignity of the Thing.”⁷⁴ Lacan famously uses the object of a vase which represents a “*nothing* in particular . . . [it is] a void and thereby introduces the possibility of filling it (emphasis added).”⁷⁵ In his work on queerness as that which figures this voidal space in its structuring of negativity, Lee Edelman takes up this discussion on the sublimation of the Thing whereby “that dignity marks the prophylactic distance that separates the Thing from ourselves.”⁷⁶ Edelman uses this logic of sublimation to argue that “Blackness,” “woman,” “queerness,” and “transness,” name this voidal space. However, when they become sublimated as figures, they expose their positivization since “they lack an ontological relation to ontological impossibility.”⁷⁷ As figures of this negative ontology, they stand in to figure this nothingness. Following this line of thought, what happens when what is raised to the dignity of the Thing is similarly a space of negation? Indeed, the atopic space I am gesturing to here is that of abjection. The anticipation-as-abjection I have described here, along with the jouissance of its encounter for the listener, is a way of approaching the nothingness of this negation. In other words, to follow the negativity of anxious anticipation in *KiCK iii*, the residual discomfort of unresolved anticipation, and its tantalizing orgasmic pleasure provide the listener not with objects by which a world can be built. Rather, it fills the listener to the limit of feeling anticipation before encountering the emptiness of nothing. ■

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74. Ibid., 112.

75. Ibid., 120.

76. Lee Edelman, *Bad Education: Why Queer Theory Teaches Us Nothing* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2022), 48.

77. Ibid., 20.

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